



**KEMENTERIAN KEWANGAN**

**OPENING KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY  
YB SENATOR DATUK SERI AMIR HAMZAH AZIZAN  
MINISTER OF FINANCE II**

**2ND ASEAN BANKING AND FINANCE SUMMIT 2026  
NAVIGATING BANKING IN A NEW GEO-ECONOMIC ERA –  
ENHANCING TRUST, TECHNOLOGY, TALENT, TRANSFORMATION**

***COPING WITH GLOBAL GEOECONOMICS CHALLENGES  
HOW THE MALAYSIAN ECONOMY AND FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS  
CAN RESPOND AND STRENGTHEN RESILIENCE***

**11:00 AM | MONDAY | 9 MARCH 2026  
THE RITZ-CARLTON KUALA LUMPUR**

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

**Salutations:**

1. Tan Sri Majid Khan,  
*Chairman of KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific;*
  
2. Tan Sri Michael Yeoh,  
*Chairman of the ASEAN Economic Club and President of KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific;*
  
3. Tan Sri Dr. Munir Majid,  
*President of the ASEAN Business Club;*
  
4. Distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh  
And Salam Malaysia MADANI

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. It is a great pleasure to be here this morning at the 2nd ASEAN Banking and Finance Summit. I want to thank the organisers for choosing a theme that could not be more timely: navigating banking in a new geo-economic era.
2. Let me begin with a story. If you have ever visited the coastline of Matang in Perak, you will have seen one of the largest and best-managed mangrove forests in the world.
3. For over a hundred years, the Matang mangroves have stood where the river meets the sea - where freshwater and saltwater collide, where tides shift twice a day, and where the soil is neither firm nor still. By any measure, it is an inhospitable place to grow.
4. And yet, the mangroves thrive. Not because they avoid the turbulence, but because they have adapted to it. Their roots do not go deep into a single point. They spread wide, interlock with one another, and anchor the entire coastline. When the tsunami struck in 2004, it was the mangrove coasts that held. The concrete seawalls cracked. The mangroves bent, and stood back up.
5. I share this because I think this is an honest image of what our financial institutions, and indeed our economies, must become.

Ladies and gentlemen,

6. We are living in a moment of extraordinary turbulence. Just two weeks ago, we saw major escalation of geopolitical conflict between United States and Iran. The retaliatory strikes across the Gulf tell us this is no longer a contained crisis. It is a regional conflict with global consequences.
7. For those of us in this room, the implications are real and immediate. Energy prices feed directly into inflation, into borrowing costs, into the credit risk calculations that every bank makes every single day. Supply chain disruptions affect the borrowers that our banks finance.
8. Geopolitical instability reshapes the investment appetite of the multinational corporations we are courting. When energy routes are threatened and trade corridors become contested, every economy in ASEAN feels it. And yet, turbulence is not new to us.
9. What matters is how we have responded. And the record speaks for itself.
10. Malaysia's economy grew at 5.2 percent in 2025, beating even our own forecasts. Domestic demand remains resilient, investment is surging, driven by multi-year infrastructure projects. Our fiscal deficit is narrowing towards the 3 percent goal under the Fiscal Responsibility Act, and the Ringgit has strengthened meaningfully.
11. We did not achieve this by hiding from the storm. We achieved it by spreading our roots.

12. When the MADANI government took office, we made a deliberate choice. We said: we will not build an economy optimised for fair weather. We will build one that is resilient enough for foul weather.
13. That meant fiscal reform. Shifting from blanket to targeted subsidies, not because it was popular, but because it was right. It meant digitising our tax infrastructure through e-invoicing, so that the system is fair and transparent. And it meant focusing on the quality of investments, not just the quantity.
14. These may not be glamorous reforms. But they are the roots that hold the coastline.
15. Now, to the bankers and financiers in this room, and I know there are many of you, let me speak directly.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

16. The theme of this summit calls for trust, technology, talent, and transformation. These are the right words. But let me add one more: resilience. We have moved from a world of efficiency-driven globalisation to one of security-driven geo-economics.
17. In this new world, banks are no longer neutral intermediaries. They either absorb shocks or they transmit them. Capital flows, currencies, sanctions, and technology controls now shape banking risk just as much as credit risk does. Your institutions must be more than efficient. They must be shock-absorbent.

18. **First, on trust.** In an era of AI, digital money, and fragmented geopolitics, trust has replaced collateral as the scarcest asset in banking. When a small business owner in Kedah walks into a bank branch and gets a loan because e-invoicing now gives her a verifiable transaction history, that is trust being earned at the ground level.
19. Financial inclusion is infrastructure for the economy. Strong governance, transparency, and ethical conduct are now competitive advantages. So, my message to the banking sector: build trust the way you build capital. Deliberately, consistently, and with long-term returns in mind.
20. **Second, on technology.** Malaysia is positioning itself as a regional hub for digital finance. Bank Negara's regulatory sandbox is exploring stablecoins and digital payment corridors. We want to be the jurisdiction where innovation happens within guardrails.
21. For ASEAN, the opportunity is enormous. Cross-border payment systems, digital trade finance, and real-time settlement can reduce the friction that holds back intra-ASEAN commerce.
22. But let me be candid: technology can scale intelligence, but it cannot replace judgement. Without the right talent and culture, digital transformation is just faster mistakes.
23. Every board in this room should be asking: are we investing in technology to serve our people, or are we spending on expensive automation?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

24. **Third, on talent.** We need bankers who understand not just balance sheets and credit models, but geopolitics and the communities they serve. The next generation of financial leaders must be bilingual in this sense: fluent in both the language of markets and the language of communities.
25. Talent strategy is no longer a human resources issue. It is a national competitiveness issue. I would urge every institution in this room to invest in developing leaders who can read a balance sheet and geoeconomics with equal confidence.
26. **And fourth, on transformation.** The old banking playbook focused on managing risks within known systems. The new era requires building resilience against unknown shocks. Redundancy in your systems is not inefficiency. It is insurance.
27. Long-term capital adequacy, deep domestic funding bases, and liquidity buffers matter more today than they have in a generation. Every stress test, every capital buffer, every diversification strategy is an act of foresight. The banks that will lead ASEAN through this era are those that prepare for disruption, not those that assume stability.

Ladies and gentlemen,

28. I want to return to the mangroves for a moment. One of the remarkable things about a mangrove ecosystem is that it does not survive alone. The trees interlock their roots with one another. The system holds because it is connected. No single tree anchors the coastline - the forest does.

29. The banking and finance ecosystem is that forest. No single institution, no single country, can anchor the system alone. We cannot navigate this geo-economic era by ourselves. But together, we become something greater than the sum of our parts.
30. Malaysia stands ready. We have a strong and stable economy. We have a financial system that is well-capitalised and well-regulated. We have the advantage of our Islamic finance expertise, which offers ethical and inclusive financial instruments to a world that increasingly demands both. And we have something that cannot be manufactured: a strategic willingness to engage with all partners, East and West, North and South. Where others see fragmentation, we see an invitation to connect.
31. So let me close with this. The world will not wait for us to be ready. The shocks will keep coming, the rules will keep shifting, and the old certainties will not return. The question for everyone in this room is simple: will we be shaped by these forces, or will we shape our response to them?
32. ***I believe the answer is clear. Like the mangrove, we do not wait for the waters to calm. We grow where we are planted. We spread our roots wide. We hold the coastline together. That is the work of resilient banking and finance. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is the Malaysia that stands before you today.***

Wabillahi Taufik Wal Hidayah, Wassalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.

Thank you.